

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PANAMA 06468 081435Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 CPR-01 /064 W
-----013551 082123Z /64

R 072130Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3576
INFO PANCANAL
USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 6468

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, PN
SUBJECT: PLEBISCITE ON PANAMA CANAL TREATY

1. LUIS CARLOS NORIEGA, PRESIDENT OF THE ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL, TOLD EMBASSY POLITICAL COUNSELOR SEPTEMBER 6 THAT THE LIKE-LIEST DATE FOR THE PLEBISCITE IS NOVEMBER 20. HE SAID HE WAS RECOMMENDING THAT DATE, BUT DID NOT KNOW WHETHER IT WOULD BE ACCEPTED. ON A CONFIDENTIAL BASIS, HE SUPPLIED A COPY OF THE DRAFT LAW WHICH HE HAS FORWARDED TO THE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION. (WE WILL REPORT ON THIS IN DETAIL ONCE THE LAW HAS BEEN PROMULGATED.)

2. NORIEGA SAID THAT HIS BIGGEST PROBLEM ARISES FROM THE LARGE NUMBER OF PANAMANIAN CITIZENS WITHOUT IDENTIFICATION CARDS (CEDULAS) WHICH WILL SERVE AS PROOF OF ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE. HE SAID THAT, OUT OF 925,000 ELIGIBLE VOTERS, ABOUT 80,000 HAVE NO CEDULA. NORIEGA SAID THAT HE WAS UNDERTAKING A CRASH PROGRAM TO GET CARDS TO ALL BEFORE A THE PLEBISCITE, BUT ESTIMATED THAT THERE WOULD STILL BE 50,000 WITHOUT CARDS WHEN THAT TIME COMES. HE SAID THAT PROVISION WOULD BE MADE FOR ALL ELIGIBLE PANAMANIAN TO VOTE REGARDLESS OF WHETHER THEY HAD CEDULAS.

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PAGE 02 PANAMA 06468 081435Z

3. ACCORDING TO THE PANAMANIAN CONSTITUTION IT IS THE "DUTY" OF ALL PANAMANIAN TO VOTE. IN EFFECT IT IS OBLIGATORY, AND NORIEGA'S DRAFT LAW INCLUDES PENALTIES FOR NON-VOTERS. BUT HE SAID THAT SANCTIONS HAVE NEVER BEEN ENFORCED AND DOUBTLESS WOULD NOT BE THIS TIME. ALL PANAMANIAN 18 YEARS OR OLDER ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE.

THE BALLOT WILL BE SECRET.

4. COMMENT: THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT IS OBVIOUSLY GOING TO PULL OUT THE STOPS TO GET A BIG TURNOUT FOR THE PLEBISCITE. IN THE FIRST PLACE, ASSUMING THE VOTE IS FAVORABLE, THE BIGGER THE VOTE THE BIGGER THE POLITICAL FILLIP FOR TORRIJOS. AND SECOND, UNINTERESTED, UNSOPHISTICATED CITIZENS ARE EXPECTED TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT MORE FAITHFULLY THAN POLITICAL LITERATES, WHO ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE DISPUTATIOUS OR COMMITTED TO OPPOSITION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CANALS, REFERENDUMS, VOTER REGISTRATION, IDENTITY DOCUMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Sep-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PANAMA06468
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770325-1185
Format: TEL
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770991/aaaacyjy.tel
Line Count: 73
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 6f414a4b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1365149
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PLEBISCITE ON PANAMA CANAL TREATY
TAGS: PINT, PBOR, EWWT, PN
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/6f414a4b-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009